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ABSTRACT

The theme of social justice and social change in rhetoric and composition in this year's Conference on College Composition and Communication presents a perfect opportunity to take up the matter of extra obligations imposed on writing classes. The extra obligations the composition community urges its teachers to take up are, of course, usually excellent, and in fact many composition classes achieve these goals. But what David Jolliffe calls "transcendent" goals may be just as well received when they are a by-product, not the direct object of study. This paper argues that writing classes should, rather, focus directly on having students learn to write well about well-defined disciplinary subjects. The paper considers the differing opinions of many composition scholars, such as Erika Lindemann, Patricia Bizzell, Kurt Spellmeyer, Joseph Williams, and Greg Colomb, on what should be taught in the writing class and how it should be taught. It contends that the study of writing based in the close study of a discipline is not likely to be "blind to questions of value"--teachers who are expert in and care about their subjects are very insistent upon matters of value. Attached are assignment sequences prepared by graduate students instructors for Cornell first-year writing seminars and a sample assignment sequence. (NKA)

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Writing Across the Curriculum and Into Social Critique?

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Paper presented at the Annual Conference on College Composition and Communication
(53rd, Chicago, IL, March 20-23, 2002)

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CS 510 867

Writing across the Curriculum and into Social Critique?

Some of you may be writing program administrators and undoubtedly most of you teach writing. You may share, then, the exasperation and annoyance I feel when the first-year writing course is asked to do the stuff for which the rest of the university community doesn't want to take responsibility. I don't know what you've been asked to incorporate into *your* writing classes, but at Cornell, it has been suggested, for example, that writing seminar instructors should act as academic advisors for the students in their seminars. We know our students so well, after all, and we teach them in small classes--surely we can take on this additional task. I am therefore all the more surprised when I see my own composition community trying to do the same thing--impose extra responsibilities and goals on what is already a full-time job, namely teaching students to write.

The theme of social justice and social change in rhetoric and composition in this year's conference obviously presents a perfect opportunity for me to take up this matter of extra obligations imposed on writing classes. The extra obligations the composition community urges its teachers to take up are, of course, usually excellent, and in fact many composition classes achieve these goals. I do not believe, however, that we should try to make them into the appropriate and explicit focus for all writing classes. Indeed, I'd like to argue that what David Jolliffe calls "transcendent" goals may be just as well achieved when they are a by-product, not the direct object of study. Writing classes should, rather, focus directly on having students learn to write well about well-defined disciplinary subjects.

What do I mean by transcendent goals--and why am I dubious that we should teach directly to them? Take this analogy. I want my students to be happy. That does not mean that I am going to offer a course in happiness. (I might do so, I suppose, if I were a professor in

psychology or human behavior, but I'm not.) I do believe, however, that greater happiness will be an outcome for my students this semester when they learn the pleasures of writing and revising and producing through intensive labor a really nice piece of prose about a poem we have been studying. "Happiness," however, will be purely a by-product; I do not choose my pedagogy and texts with happiness per se as an object; rather, I hope to produce close readers of poetry who can write intelligently and appreciatively about it.

David Jolliffe expresses similar reservations when he addresses the "transcendent" goals that have come to be assigned to composition classes. In an essay on the topic, Jolliffe points out two transcendent purposes commonly advocated from within the composition community. One transcendent goal is that of enabling students to write well in other courses--not in the one in which they are enrolled. A second transcendent goal is helping students to become good citizens. I have observed a third, related "transcendent" goal often urged in composition studies: enabling students to find their own voices, their own authority, generally by turning to personal experience.

We all know of and admire composition advocates for each of the "transcendent" goals I've mentioned. Erika Lindemann, for instance, argues that literature should not be the subject matter of a course, and proposes specifically that the purpose of writing courses is to offer "guided practice in reading and writing the discourses of the academy and the professions" (312). Literature is beyond the pale for assignments precisely because both the teachers and writers might get too interested in it and neglect to think about writing. Another example: Patricia Bizzell proposes excellent courses designed to produce good citizens, good citizenship being based on students' ability to be "effective communicators in a multicultural democracy, the United States" ("Theories" 8). The courses she designs, as in her textbook, *Negotiating Difference: Cultural Case Studies for Composition*, draw on historical materials that help her to

achieve this goal. Kurt Spellmeyer, in texts such as his thought-provoking essay, "A Common Ground: The Essay in the Academy," emphasizes achieving personal authority through reflection on personal experience. He is critical of writing based in disciplines because he believes that narrowly defined writing tasks in the disciplines lock students into a rigid, foreign discourse without giving them a chance to find their own voices, a way to test the discipline's values.

Why has each of these bases for composition classes failed to capture the entire composition community? Why don't all writing teachers now concentrate on helping students understand the forms of writing needed for other courses so that they will write well in them? Or focus on contact zone moments in history that will raise our students' social consciousness? Or focus on personal writing that will develop our students' personal authority? Speaking personally, I know I can't handle all these transcendent goals. As I see it, these perfectly admirable transcendent goals have sometimes been attached too firmly to particular subjects and methods. I myself, for instance, assuredly want my students to write well in other courses, but I cannot (or will not) learn enough about science to help students write lab reports or research papers. Likewise, I thoroughly admire Bizzell's goals, but I just don't have, or want, the historical expertise to do what she does. And if I did want to teach a "social awareness" writing seminar, it could be unwise for me to seek a quick fix. It can be a dangerous practice to try to teach superficially appreciated or unfamiliar subject matter just because someone else convinces us it's our moral obligation to try.

The dangerousness of urging the attachment of worthy transcendent goals to particular subjects and methods is made clear by Peter Vandenberg in a recent report on multicultural textbooks used in writing courses.

Because many writing teachers do not feel knowledgeable enough to construct a syllabus that focuses on multiculturalism, but believe they should teach to the transcendent toal of better citizenship, they naturally enough look for thematic readers to do the job for them. What Vandenberg found is that textbooks compiled with the aim of teaching multiculturalism instead tamed it. The textbooks, he says, "Place difference and diversity in front of students without explicitly disrupting the rather conservative sorting function that writing instruction continues to play in American higher education" (554). He goes on to explain that the textbooks are "repositories of 'content, decontextualized fodder that students discuss and then repackage into representations of the ideal" (555). The textbooks, he points out, are startlingly uniform. All assimilate diverse texts into sameness with the texts along which they are placed (556). In the end, the study of multiculturalism from such thematic collections results in uniform expectations of homogenized writing from homogenized students. In other words, trying to use someone else's methods and texts can have unintended, even unfortunate, results.

While Bizzell suggest turning to historical texts from historical moments to achieve the end of having students become more critical and active members of society, Kurt Spellmeyer urges using personal writing because he finds that students feel alienated from the subject matter in disciplinary writing. In the essay I mentioned earlier, Spellmeyer gives the example of a student who wrote on Durkheim's *Suicide* in an entry-level sociology course. The student was apparently asked to discuss Durkheim and to make suggestions "addressing the problem of teenage suicides" (272). In doing so, the student wrote stiffly, in an unsatisfactory imitation of academic discourse, and retreated primarily into summary of Durkheim although he had been asked to produce suggestions of his own about how to reduce teenage suicide. Spellmeyer notes a "pervasive absence of commitment" which is the result of the student's having "nothing of his own to say" (271). Spellmeyer's solution to the student's lack of success with the assignment is

to suggest that he "adopt a critical attitude toward his own family, group, church, and community. They are, after all, [he says] the only institutions that he knows in detail, and the only ones against which he could test Durkheim's argument and method. His unwillingness to allow personal experience to intrude upon what he perceives as the objectivity of academic discourse finally prevents him from coming to understand such discourse" (273).

We can't chat with the student, but we can easily come up with speculations about why he failed with this assignment, speculations other than that the student was "unwilling" "to allow personal experience to intrude," being trapped instead in an approximation of academic discourse. In reading the student's failure to test Durkheim thoroughly, as the student's "lack of commitment," Spellmeyer draws what seems to me an unwarranted conclusion about the student's intentions and motivations. If anything, my experience suggests that if the student had had any idea how to express an opinion more fully and convincingly from any source, including personal experience, he would have been more than willing to do so. We can just as reasonably conjecture that the failure here may have been in the way the assignment was written, so that it elicited summary rather than analysis and elicited a final tacked-on section of personal opinion, or, even more likely, that the failure lay in inadequate writing preparation in this specialized subject matter. The student is correctly "deferential" and "perfunctory" (272) because he has, evidently, read and studied no one but Durkheim on the subject of suicide, and has, it seems pretty clear, written no other paper about Durkheim but this one. How can his essay be other than deferential and perfunctory if he does not know *how* to analyze Durkheim? And with or without the resource of personal experience, what does he know about solutions for teenage suicide? (Genuine experts evidently haven't found easy cures.) And what if the student *were* to turn, for authority, to his personal experience? How much thought, organized thought, does his teacher expect him to have given to suicide and to those other institutions in his personal

experience– family, church–to be able to draw intelligently on them as sources? Does he know how to be "critical" of his family and church? Is this not also "learned" discourse which would have to be taught, which the student would have to practice?

It takes considerable experience and confidence to be able to integrate knowledge of our own lives into professional discourse, and it takes considerable knowledge of an entire field to know how our own lives relate to it. If the student lacks models, practice, and instruction, he will fare no better when writing from experience about suicide than he has already fared: he needs to go through a process of learning, needs to learn what moves to make.

David Jolliffe believes that "composition instruction too rarely offers students any kind of regimen, any planned method, for *learning* about these subject matters [such as suicide] in the course of writing about them" (293). The more important question to ask, then, is not whether students should draw on personal experience or on contact zone moments in history, but whether they have indeed been offered "any kind of regimen, any planned method, for *learning*"? What work preceded the paper that the student wrote based on Durkheim's book? What work helps the student learn to analyze his own experience? I would argue that if the teacher provided a good sequence of preparatory assignments, probably including personal writing, the student would probably become more more of an authority on Durkheim and on the problem of suicide, and would develop the voice with which to speak on that subject in society.

Our discussion, as I see it, then, should not be over particular transcendent goals--whether or not we help students to write well for other courses, or develop personal authority, or become good citizens. No sensible person would argue against the desirability of these or of many other outcomes. *But we can and do debate where and how such outcomes should be achieved. That's because they should and can be achieved almost inevitably in any responsibly taught course.* Good citizenship is surely an appropriate concern of the biology teacher or of the

history teacher. Good writing in other courses, or in the community, can well be an ultimate consideration of any teacher who assigns writing. Rather, our discussion should concern *how* to help students learn actively, through writing, about a subject, *our* choice of subject, so that some of these transcendent goals may come about.

At this point I would like to turn to the argument for teaching writing in particular, in the disciplines, that is, the argument for teaching students how to write by having them write in subject-based courses taught by teachers expert in that subject, whether music, government, or the English novel. Considering the argument for the teaching of writing in disciplinarily subject-based courses will necessarily include consideration of how teaching writing in a discipline helps students learn to write well as well as leading ultimately to transcendent goals.

In considering how writing should be taught, Joseph Williams and Greg Colomb have argued that "students do not write academic discourse in general, but rather in particular kinds" ("The Case" 260). Similarly, students do not develop values such as good citizenship in general, but in particular. Spellmeyer, seeking the transcendent goal of the student's voice and social commitment, would have us not teach the lab report or the ethnography, because such explicit discourse techniques "discourage . . . thinking that might culminate in necessary social change" (269). But this observation does not differentiate between abstractly studying these forms in a generic composition course and writing a lab report or ethnography that is embedded in study of a subject. Williams and Colomb believe "It may be that explicit teaching is a necessary step in the process of empowering students to choose how they participate in the communities they encounter and to what degree they will let that participation define who and what they are" ("The Case" 262). In other words, it is explicit teaching–how to understand Durkheim, how to write about him, how to compare his ideas to those of other sociologists, how to use personal experience and the active or passive voice while doing so–that will deepen a student's

understanding. As a consequence, his own immediate experience will gain meaning and relevance, his concept of the "personal" eventually will develop and broaden, his ideas about himself in relation to society may develop. As students learn how to make choices, whether about the use of the passive voice or about the validity of Durkheim's conclusions, their voices and authority will emerge.

For as students learn how to participate in a field they can develop personal relationships to the subject, "personal" in a new and richer way beyond the autobiographical and eventually beyond the course itself. The voice we may preferably look for in our students is the kind Gordon Harvey contrasts to the "autobiographical" voice: Harvey looks for the personal in the sense of "presence," which he defines as "the concept we invoke when we feel life in writing, when we feel an individual invested in a subject and freely directing the essay–not surrendering control to a discipline's conventions, or to a party line, or to easy sentiments and structures, or to stock phrases" (650). It may be that a student such as the one writing on Durkheim will never develop the "presence," that can become "good citizenship," if she does not go through a challenging series of writing and other engagements with a particular text, including many stages—stages that would make available to the student a range of experiences, including the personal, including summaries, including particular analyses of features of texts, and so on.

The point here to notice is that I am suggesting that we can teach writing by teaching a particular subject in which we are expert and enthusiastic; let the transcendent goals follow as they may, and *will*. Like Aviva Freedman I believe that composition classes may achieve less than may the disciplinary course, a course in which writing is not even the primary object. In her research, Freedman surprisingly found that composition classes she examined offer less teacherly support and guidance for the production of writing in terms of "collaborative engagement, between novices and experts, in authentic, meaningful tasks," than do disciplinary

classes. She found that "The composition class seem[ed] bare and sparse by contrast" (135). In addition she found that "students in composition classes wrote essays that sounded more like what our culture recognizes as 'narrative' than arguments that resembled what our profession recognizes and values as 'argument" (135. Yet surely being able to construct a sound argument is important to good citizenship.

David Bartholomae shares Freedman's dismay at composition courses that teach generic "writing" as dissociated from critical thought. Bartholomae has observed that

> [i]n a strange displacement, revision is not usually taught [or thought of by students, I would add] as criticism. In fact, as a result of the 'writing process movement, criticism was removed from the writing course, where it was seen as counterproductive (a 'barrier' to writing) . . . [it was] deliberately blind to questions of value. . . Students learned to produce writing; questions of value seldom, if ever, came up, at least as value is imagined as social value. (27)

The study of writing based in the close study of a discipline is not likely to be "blind to questions of value"--teachers who are expert in and care about their subjects are very insistent upon matters of value. They care that students thoroughly understand and appreciate the topics being studied. As we all know, when we read students' responses to study questions, rough drafts, and essays, we cannot mistake whether or not they are learning what we hope for. If we haven't been successful, we have to try to teach better. That is why I believe we need not worry about whether or not writing courses will achieve some important transcendent values, and certainly we do not need to worry about through what objects of study they do so. Students who learn to write their way through the pros and cons of a position will be better citizens. To speak personally, I believe that in my writing seminar on poetry, students who have noticed the telling voice of a poet's

choice of "a" rather than "the" are on their way to being more able, critical readers of our society's texts.

I'm suggesting, then, that we can help students most as future citizens, or future students in other courses, and so on, by making sure that we teach a subject we consider worth teaching students to write about and in which we are expert. We should be sure that students get to enroll in writing seminars with subjects that interest them. We should be very sure that instructors and students to go about the business of reading and writing and learning as intensively, and particularly as possible. Some instructors may teach the personal essay, some may teach contact zone moments in history, others, like me, may teach the reading of poetry.

What about inexperienced instructors? Can we rely on inexperienced instructors in disciplines such as music or government to come up with such courses? In my experience, the answer is a resounding yes, if they are given the appropriate training and encouragement not to think of teaching writing as teaching grammar. I have brought copies of one assignment for you to examine by a (then) new TA in music and have included references to others; all were produced by inexperienced teachers of writing. Caring about their subjects, they cared about how their students wrote themselves into the discipline and understood its significance.

I would like to conclude by sharing with you a statement made by William Goldsmith, a professor in City and Regional Planning--although I could have used the words of the TA in music on your handout. Goldsmith wrote his statement after participating in the Writing Program's training and after teaching his first First-Year Writing Seminar on inner cities and suburbs. This is what he says he learned. Describing the sequence of writing work that he developed and the exciting labors of his students, whose writing improved as their thinking became more searching, he concludes: "Whether the students from this writing seminar become dentists, lawyers, accountants or teachers, and even though they may live in suburbs, they will

be helped by their efforts to write about the voiceless people who live in the central cities. I hope these students will write better on many subjects, for every audience, because they had once to think accurately and write precisely about these pivotal but usually avoided issues" (20).

Given freedom from coverage, the freedom to explore a subject that can occur in a writing course, most teachers start to think about what they want their students to know. They *do* want them to "know" their subjects. But who values mechanical replication of our own ideas? Why do we share our knowledge, encouraging others to think about what we love? We do so because we think our subject is important. And that importance tends to lie in some "transcendent" values.

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WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AND INTO SOCIAL CRITIQUE?

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Sample Assignment Sequence

Richard Will
Popular Music Since 1950
First-Year Writing Seminar
Cornell University

Commentary provided by Katherine Gottschalk

Richard Will, when he taught a First-Year Writing Seminar, was a Ph.D. candidate in musicology (which has remained his field). Will's sequence illustrates the kinds of goals and methods he absorbed when himself working in the preparatory seminar for new instructors (Writing 700). The seminar is deeply seated in Will's own disciplinary interests. Will wrote about his objectives for Music 117: Popular Music Since 1950, a course which could and would be taken by many non-majors from many of Cornell's colleges:

> My aim is twofold: first, to introduce students to techniques appropriate for the analysis of popular music; second, to encourage them to evaluate critically what they read about pop. I pursue both of these goals through writing, asking the students to engage critical writing on two levels. First, they practice adopting various common languages–the hyperbole of the rock critic, the objectivity of the historian, the density of the sociologist. Second, they write "metacritical" reviews, in which they take a stance on selected methodologies and styles.
>
> Both of these components ultimately work for a common purpose: to help students find a "voice" for writing–and thinking–about popular music. This goal has repercussions beyond the seminar room, as pop is a primary topic of conversation for casual fans as well as *aficionados*, and its lyrics serve as a fund of social philosophy. Awakening students to the effects of both its music and its attendant criticism provides them with a first step towards understanding their place in our media-saturated society and will encourage students to approach the discourse of all media more critically.

Will's statement of goals indicates concern not just for teaching students how to be musicologists–he knows this is both their first and probably last course in the subject–but for teaching them pop in terms of some overarching goals: the next teachers of Will's students will be glad to find they had to "evaluate critically what they read" "through writing"; we see also that dominant features of Will's approach are concern for students' self-awareness, authority, and voice (students are to "find a 'voice' for writing–and thinking") and concern for students as communicators in a mass/multi-media culture (there are "repercussions beyond the seminar room").

Examination of a few of Will's assignments suggests how he planned the writing to achieve his goals. For him the students' development of critical powers and voice is not an expectation of one assignment but the pervasive goal of writing assignments developing throughout the entire course. Here is an excerpt from Will's first paper assignment:

> Choose a single piece or album that you already know well. Imagine that you are writing a brief review like that which we read from *Time* . . Think of your audience as people like yourself . . . While you needn't try to be self-consciously "hip" like the *Time* reviewer, don't write an academic report. Match your style and attitude to your subject matter.

Will here begins his course by having his students immediately write an essay that calls *only* on their previous personal knowledge of the subject and that specifically locates the task outside normal academic discourse. Obviously the students will do more or less well with this task, depending on their previous training with style and with actual language to use about music, but Will is aware of this, asking only to see what his students know about pop and how they can write about it at this entry point. More skills, more awareness, will come later, but he is already directing students' attention to questions of voice, audience, style, and argument–central concerns in his approach to music and culture.

First taking up the "why" of pop music study, Will asked his students to read several short selections from Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*. The essay assignments he now gives are preceded by simple preparatory reading and writing exercises that explore the text. For a passage in which Bloom contrasts the democratic privileges available (according to Bloom) to a 13-year old American boy with that same boy's experience in listening to rock music, Will asks:

. . . . list opposite each other the main verbs and images of each of the corresponding phrases in sentences 2 & 4; i.e., for the first phrases:

Sentence 2	*Sentence 4*
won, consecrated	*vs.* throbs
liberties, alliance	*vs.* pubescent, body
philosophic genius, political	orgasmic rhythms
heroism, blood of martyrs	

What intellectual/cultural worlds do these two sets of images remind you of? Do they sound familiar from other writing you have read? Describe each in a sentence or two.

Students were also asked to write one or two sentences in response to questions such as "For Bloom, what is music? How does it work on our intellectual/spiritual selves?" and then to "write a short paragraph explaining why rock music destroys Bloom's educational Utopia." Will is having his students closely examine language as it relates to meaning–why does Bloom's diction vary in different contexts?–and work on definitions–what is "music" for Bloom? The writing work is about Bloom; it is not yet the student's own.

After this preparatory exploration, Will gives students the following essay assignment, designed to help students move from study of Bloom to analysis of their own relationship to pop and education: "Cornell's Committee on Curriculum Development has asked you to speak at their next meeting on the following topic: 'Popular Music and the University.' They wish your opinion: Is pop an appropriate and useful topic for American undergraduates?" Among other instructions not included here, Will suggests that his students argue logically, having studied Bloom's logic, and that while avoiding diatribe ". . . if you can, work in some of Bloom's rhetorical shaping and imagery, [so that] your argument will be all the more persuasive." Will is directing student thought to the connection between language and meaning–their own language as well as Bloom's–as part of the process of learning how to talk about their subject, pop music and culture.

Moving from "why" and the simpler language of popular criticism, Will next turns to the "how" of pop study and the necessary immersion into a specialized field. He first has his students "experiment with analytical techniques and terminology," asking them to carefully explain the key terms he wants them to employ. Paper 3 provides the "how" follow-up to this kind of practice, when he directs students to

> 1. Take a single song [of your own choice] and examine how the music "interprets" or "gives meaning" to the lyrics. . . OR
> 2. Examine different versions of a song [of the student's choice] and explain how you think the differing musical settings affect (or do not affect) the "message" of the lyrics.

Appropriately, Will specifies the students' peers as their audience for this writing, and follows through with peer review of drafts.

At this point, Will became dissatisfied with his students' ability to revise papers. They made only sentence level changes—revision is not yet criticism. And so he made a wise move. He didn't just tell students to think more–explore, ask questions–while the students remained as innocent of ideas as before. He constructed a new assignment which would help students to "see" their work freshly so that revision could indeed follow. In a two-week rewriting process, students reworked the essays they had written so far in order to integrate them into a new paper. They rewrote using new information, but information they had studied:

> In Paper 2 you discussed the place of popular music in university study. In Paper 3, you studied popular music in the university; you applied to pop methods of close analysis and interpretation used in classes about Western "art" music, literature, architecture, etc. Now I want you to integrate these two papers in the following context:
>
> The Curriculum Committee was so impressed by your presentation (Paper 2) that they have asked you to testify before a statewide panel composed of prominent New York educators, Mario Cuomo, and selected rock stars. Your task will be to use your analyses of Paper 3 to demonstrate your thesis of paper 2; to show how what we learn from such analyses fits (or doesn't fit) into your vision of undergraduate study.

More explication of the task follows, including the advice to "search for ways to be concise: use active verbs, vary your sentence structure and length . . . This is a statewide hearing: your comments are being given a proportionately longer share of time--four typed, double-spaced pages." Students have been studying Bloom's style; they have been working with Richard Lanham and Joseph William's style books. But Will removes the lessons from exercises and from application to "authorities" to the students' own writing. They are receiving concrete instructions about how not to be lifeless and dull, how to *sound* committed (part of the process toward "presence" that solely doing a writing from experience exercise would not have achieved).

As the course moved toward its conclusion Will had students look beyond the single song to larger questions; he also moved students toward a critical stance on criticism. As preparatory work, they examined the language of several reference works, as well as applying the ideas they found in these sources to their own experience; in their last major project, they became contributing participants in the world of musical criticism. This final writing project drew on all the students' personal experience in this course in a seemingly impersonal, but ultimately rewarding way: picking one artist or group, each student was to compile a discography and bibliography and also write an interpretation of the artist or group "suitable for inclusion in an informal reference book like RSIH (*Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*), the reference work they had been using all semester. This project gave them a place to draw together and apply all of the semester's writing/ thinking work. And the students were asked to take charge: "*You* are writing the encyclopedia article now; take the opportunity to declare through your focus, method, and style what kind of writing you think best fits the popular music you love." Their voices were to emerge, and emerge appropriately for the occasion and subject. Will observes that the use of secondary material "provided a final and valuable lesson on the students' relationship to pop writing. Their tendency to let the critics speak for them, and to go to great lengths to incorporate 'accepted' critical views into their own, gave them (after I pointed it out) an important understanding of this authority, and a knowledge of how to appropriate it for themselves to participate in, rather than simply absorb, popular culture."

Will taught a very good seminar that served many larger purposes, even though he was concentrating on teaching a good music course. For instance, helping students be good writers in other subjects was not predominantly on Will's mind. But--not surprisingly--seeing his own subject in relation to the academy and popular culture, Will insisted his students do the same when they wrote. Will's students spent the semester exploring the vagaries of voice and audience, the interlocked demands of style and culture. Will's goal was not to produce good citizens, but his goal was indeed to enable students to understand and be able to write about pop music, and for Will such understanding meant participation and appropriation, not passive replication. Will achieved such goals through immersion in and enthusiasm for issues of pop music, an enthusiasm he wanted his students to share.